

# PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF NGOs

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## SUMMARY AND GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

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### COMPLETE VERSION OF THE RESEARCH:

[http://www.aed.hr/hr/dokumenti/200511\\_stavovi\\_javnosti.pdf](http://www.aed.hr/hr/dokumenti/200511_stavovi_javnosti.pdf)



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## 1. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE ABOUT NGOS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

A large majority of Croatian citizens (between 83% and 91%) have heard of the term association or NGO, but less than half of them know the meaning of the term. The lowest level of knowledge about the term NGO and its meaning is among women; persons above 60 years of age; those with the lowest level of education; those with monthly incomes per household member below 1,000 kunas; and persons living in areas of middle levels of urbanization. Significant differences were found among survey respondents' knowledge about NGOs in relation to the importance of religion in their lives and their self-assessment of political orientation: a considerably larger number of citizens to whom religion is less important or not important and those with a left political orientation are familiar with the term NGO and its meaning.

When it comes to concrete knowledge of specific NGOs in certain fields, around one-quarter of respondents could not provide the name of an NGO for any of the analyzed fields of work, and about a fifth of them provided the name of an NGO in only one area. Significant differences have been found in terms of age, level of education, average monthly income and degree of urbanization. Lower levels of knowledge are characteristic of persons in the oldest age group (60 and above), persons with lower levels of education, persons with lower or average incomes, and those from areas of middle or low levels of urbanization.

The greatest percentage of citizens (around 40%) can cite at least one NGO related to associations of war veterans and victims. A little more than 33% of all citizens can name at least one NGO working in the area of environment, political organizations and campaigns, and poverty issues. About one-quarter of respondents can name an NGO dealing with consumers' rights and equality, while about 17% of all citizens can name an NGO from the area of child abuse, human rights, and health and addiction. The least known area of NGO work (with only 5% of the public able to name a relevant organization) are those dealing with national minority rights and status, development of civil society, unemployed persons, art and culture, education, and religion and religious freedoms.

Concerning the institution that citizens would contact if they were personally affected by one of 15 different problems, respondents mostly believe that NGOs can contribute to issues such as environmental protection, sexual orientation, and gender inequality. If faced with such problems, between one-third and one-fifth of all respondents said they would contact an NGO. It should be noted that these are also areas that only about one-third (for environmental protection) and one-tenth (for sexual orientation and gender inequality) of citizens consider to be significant problems in their community.

On the other hand, only up to 5% of citizens would contact NGOs in cases of corruption, child abuse, poverty and unemployment, violence, or economic problems - areas that in both open and closed questions are perceived as serious problems by the greatest majority of the public.

## 2. SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT NGOS

The basic source of information about NGOs is the news media (for 80 % of citizens), more precisely TV (61.4% of citizens). Approximately one-third of respondents know at least one person who is an active member of an NGO.

In terms of direct experience, less than one-fifth of the public has directly (either personally or through a family member) experienced some useful impact of NGO activities, out of which the greatest majority of these respondents (77%) benefited in only one of the suggested ways, most often in the form of receiving advice (8%) or easier access to information (5%). Among respondents who said they benefited from NGOs' work, there are significantly more men; middle-aged persons (30-59); persons with higher and secondary education; persons from very urbanized areas; persons to whom religion is neither important nor unimportant; and persons of right-wing political attitudes.

## 3. ATTITUDES TOWARDS NGOS

A little less than four-fifths of Croatian citizens have a **positive general attitude about the work of non-governmental organizations**, about one-fifth have a neutral attitude, and the number of those with a negative general attitude is negligible. In comparison to earlier research (GfK, 2002), positive general attitudes towards NGOs have increased.

Of all the socio-demographic characteristics, considerable differences exist only regarding age - a considerably larger number of younger citizens (less than 30 years of age) have a positive general attitude towards NGOs than middle-aged and older persons.

Although not as strongly as on the issue of general attitude, Croatian citizens **mostly express positive opinions of NGOs in terms of specific attitudes**. A little more than 60% of all citizens agree that the government should encourage NGOs' work and reduce taxes for them, and about half of all citizens agree that the government should put more direct funds into NGOs.

However, this does not mean that a significant number of citizens do not have certain negative opinions about the work of NGOs. About half of the respondents agree with claims showing skepticism about NGOs. Only 33% of all citizens agree with claims that point to a lack of skepticism, while about a fifth of the public do not agree with such claims.

When measuring specific attitudes towards NGOs, the most consistent differences were in terms of education and age. More positive attitudes are mostly expressed by citizens with a higher level of education and of a younger age. In terms of political orientation, when commenting on three out of four specific attitudes for which considerable differences exist, positive attitude is mostly expressed by citizens of right-wing political orientation, and, in comments on the one remaining attitude, positive attitude is more frequently expressed by persons of right or left-wing orientation than by those who consider themselves in the political center. In terms of the level of urbanization, positive

attitudes are mostly expressed by persons from areas of low and high levels of urbanization than by citizens from areas of middle levels of urbanization, although the difference is not very consistent or unambiguous.

According to the majority of the public, NGOs **considerably or moderately contribute** to *raising citizen's awareness about their rights* (as estimated by a little more than half) to *development of civil society and democracy in Croatia* (as estimated by 40% of all citizens), but **contribute little** to *solving concrete life problems and improving the quality of life* (as estimated by 40% of all citizens).

The greatest percentage of the public (between 37.4% and 43%) think that NGOs **have little influence** on decisions on the local, regional or national level, or on policy-making on issues that affect everyday life. In contrast, most citizens think that on all levels, NGOs **should have great influence** (between 43.2 and 49.1%), and about a third of the public (between 31 and 36%) believes that NGOs should have moderate influence. The percentage of citizens who think that NGOs should have little or no influence varies between 9 and 10%.

Croatian citizens generally agree that **individuals cannot influence decisions** that affect the local community, region, or Croatia as a whole (from 46.3% to 68.6%), but the percentage of those who think that they cannot influence these decisions as members of NGOs is significantly lower (varying between 20% and 36.4%).

On the other hand, 28% of citizens think that **as members of NGOs they can, to some extent, influence** decisions in the local community, and another 5% of citizens think that as members of NGOs, they can make a *big* difference on that level. On other levels, 18 % of citizens think that as members of an NGO they can to some extent influence regional decision-making, and 13 % of citizens think the same for decisions on the national level. A small percentage of citizens (2.1% and 1.5% respectively) believe that their influence as members of NGOs on the regional and national level can be considerable.

According to the opinion of the greatest majority of citizens (40.1%), the area in which **NGOs can do the most** is **social welfare and humanitarian work**, followed by environment (32.5%), health (31.2%), and human rights and politics (28%). As the most useful areas of NGO work, a little more than one-fifth of respondents point out sport, hobbies, and recreation (23.8%) and education and research (21.5%), followed by promotion of civil society (17.2%), art and culture (13.5%) and business and professional associations and trade unions (12.4%). A relatively small percentage of citizens consider the area of political campaigns and elections (8.2%), religion (8%), public service (4.9%) and international relations (4%) as one of the three most useful areas of NGOs' work.

#### 4. MEMBERSHIP IN NGOS

A little less than one-tenth of all Croatian citizens (8.8%) consider themselves to be NGO members - 5.4% of citizens think of themselves as active volunteers and 0.2% of citizens as professional employees in NGOs. Regarding membership in NGOs, considerable differences were determined only in terms of age and level of education: there are considerably more middle-aged citizens who are NGO members, and NGO membership increases proportionately to the level of education.

Less than a third (29.1%) of active volunteers participate in their NGO's work less than once a month, while 27.3% of them take part once or several times a month, and 36.4% of them once a week or more. Active volunteers are equally committed to the work of NGOs on the local (45.5%) and national level (47.3%), whereas inactive members are more represented in the work of NGOs working on the national level (40.6%) than on the local level (31.3%).

The majority of citizens who are currently not members of NGOs (from 75% to 59%) list the following problems as **important reasons for not participating in the work of an NGO**: lack of information about existing NGOs in their community; lack of time; not knowing enough people involved in NGOs' work; and a lack of trust in existing NGOs dealing with problems that interest them.

A little more than one-third of Croatian citizens (36.4%) state that they would surely or probably get involved in the work of an NGO if, in their community, there was an NGO dealing with issues that interest them and if someone from that NGO invited them directly to become an active member, whereas three-fourths (74.1%) of all current active volunteers would join a new NGO. Among citizens who expressed willingness to become active members of a new NGO, a significant number of them would like to join an NGO working in the area of sport, hobbies and recreation, social welfare and humanitarian work, human rights and politics, and the environment. The lowest interest in joining an NGO was shown for those dealing with international relations, religion, business and professional associations, and trade unions.

Regarding the willingness of current non-members of NGOs to join an NGO, considerable differences were determined in terms of age, level of education, level of urbanization, and political orientation. The percentage of those that would be willing to join an NGO is considerably larger in the youngest age group, among citizens with higher education, among citizens from areas of high level of urbanization, and among citizens who see themselves as closer to either the right or left-wings of the political continuum.

Regarding **motivation for possible involvement in the work of an NGO**, most Croatian citizens (between 45% and 64.9%) list as very or moderately important reasons those related to values, acquisition of knowledge, and self-improvement, and state self-protection, career advancement, and interpersonal relations as not important at all or not very important.

Similarly, most current active volunteers (from 42% to 62%) evaluate as particularly important **reasons for involvement in the work of an NGO** the desire to help solve a problem or to help people, address the needs of the community, and connect with their own needs or interest. The following reasons were listed as completely irrelevant to 44% to 66% of current active volunteers: *it was related to the needs and interest of a family member or friend; it was related to my regular job; because my friends worked there; and because people who I am close with invited me to work there.*

## 5. VOLUNTEERISM

Of all respondents, 10.7% have volunteered or worked for free in an organization, club or association in the last 12 months and 3.8% of them are regular volunteers - meaning that in the last 12 months they volunteered at least once a month or more. Among persons who volunteered at least once during the last 12 months, there are considerably more men, persons with higher education, persons with a monthly income above 3,000 kunas per family member, and persons who position themselves more to the right on the political continuum.

Of the 10.7% that volunteered at least once in the last 12 months, most organized or took part in a public event, provided practical help, advised or gave information, led a group or took part in decision-making, gave free professional services, or collected money. The majority of them participated in just one of those activities.

Regarding attitudes towards volunteering, between a little more than half and three-quarters of the public agrees with claims expressing positive attitudes, while they predominantly do not agree with claims expressing negative attitudes.

## 6. CITIZEN ACTIVISM

Almost one-fifth of all citizens have not taken part in any form of citizen activism in the last 12 months. About one-third of them participated in only one activity, and one-fifth in two types of activities. Apart from voting in the elections, the greatest percentage of citizens taking part in one of the ten listed activities signed a petition (about one-third of respondents), attended a community meeting, or boycotted certain products or services because of political, moral, or environmental reasons (a little less than one-fifth of all citizens).

Among the citizens who have taken part in at least one activity of citizen activism in the last 12 months, there is a greater percentage of men, persons with higher education, persons with higher average monthly income, and persons who position themselves more to the left or right wing on the political continuum (as opposed to the center).

## 7. INFORMAL VOLUNTEERISM

The percentage of citizens who have in any of the 11 described ways voluntarily helped someone other than a family member in the last 12 months varies from 27.4% to 75.6%. The most frequent forms of informal volunteerism (or helping others) practiced at least once in the last 12 months by more than half of Croatian citizens were counseling (75.6%); shopping or doing errands for someone (61.2%); providing transport (60.9%); lending money (59.4%); donating clothes, furniture etc. (55.6%); and taking care of assets or pets (49.8%).

91.7% of Croatian citizens in the last 12 months have helped someone other than a family member in one of the 11 described ways at least once. The percentages of citizens who engaged in only one or two such activities are relatively small (4.8% and 6.4%), whereas 66.1% engaged in three to eight activities (about 10% of citizens for each activity). Finally, 14.7% of citizens engaged in nine or more informal volunteering activities.

The percentage of citizens who have engaged in nine or more different activities of informal volunteerism in the last 12 months is relatively lower among men, older persons, and persons with lower levels of education. In terms of income and level of urbanization, the differences are more obvious in categories "two or less" and "three to eight" activities. Citizens with higher incomes and in areas of high and low levels of urbanization more often took part in three to eight activities.

## 8. DONATIONS

The percentage of Croatian citizens who donate money to various recipients varies from 26.7% to 70.7%. The greatest percentage of citizens donates money to beggars in the street and during humanitarian actions for people with illnesses.

The two most frequent ways of donating money are direct donations to an individual or organization (about one-third of citizens) and donating by phone calls (about one-fifth of all citizens). About half of Croatian citizens donate around 300 kunas a year or less, and 5 % of citizens donate more than 500 kunas a year. The percentage of citizens who donate money increases proportionately with the average monthly income. Persons to whom religion is important in life donate more. Regarding age, relatively fewer middle-aged persons donate money.

More than half of all citizens who as a rule *do not* donate money name the following reasons as very important: *"I do not believe that the money goes to those for whom it is collected"*; *"I do not have enough for my own needs"*; and *"It is a matter of principle, because I believe that these needs should be financed from other sources"*. Unimportant reasons among the majority of those who do not donate for their refusal to donate are the following: *"I do not have enough information about the possibilities for donating money"*; *"I am not aware of the needs of possible recipients"*; and *"No one asked me for donations"*.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

1. The greatest majority of Croatian citizens are familiar with the term NGO, out of which almost half of them know its meaning. However, regarding knowledge of specific NGOs in individual fields of work, approximately one-quarter of citizens cannot name a single NGO in any areas, and about one-fifth can name an NGO for only one area, mostly for the issues of war veterans and victims, environmental issues, political organizations and campaigns, poverty issues, consumer's rights, and gender equality. The most unfamiliar are NGOs dealing with national minority issues, civil society development, unemployed persons, art and culture, and religion and religious freedoms. The basic source of information about NGOs is the news media, especially television, whereas a little more than one-third of all citizens know at least one active NGO member.
2. The majority of Croatian citizens express positive general and specific attitudes towards the work of NGOs. They are more pleased with NGOs' contributions to raising awareness of human rights and development of civil society than with their efforts in solving real life problems and improving the quality of life. About half of all citizens express some skepticism towards NGOs, which does not mean that they do not welcome the improvement of their material and social status and does not preclude their belief that NGOs should have more influence on decision-making on both the local and national level. At the same time citizens are fairly unanimous in their assessment that as individuals they cannot influence decisions made on the local, regional or national level, whereas about one-third of them believe that as NGO members they can to some or considerable extent influence decision-making on the local level, about one-fifth on the regional level, and a little more than one-tenth on the national level.
3. When faced with certain social problems, most citizens would contact NGOs for environmental issues, which are assessed as a big problem by one-third of all citizens, and for issues related to the status of sexual minorities and gender equality – issues which the lowest percentage of citizens described as serious. On the other hand, a smaller percentage of citizens would contact NGOs when affected by issues that a majority of them evaluate as serious problems, such as unemployment, poverty, and economic problems. The greatest percentage of citizens believe that NGOs can do the most in the area of social services and humanitarian work, environment, health, human rights, and politics.
4. A relatively small number of Croatian citizens are involved in the work of an NGO or have received assistance or support from an NGO, mostly in the form of advice or easier access to information. On the other hand, their willingness to become involved is greater, and the reasons for their hesitation are primarily lack of information, time or interest, not knowing any NGO members, and limited visibility of NGOs that seem useful or trustworthy. A significant number of citizens who are willing to join an NGO would choose those in the area



of sport, hobbies and recreation, social services and humanitarian work, human rights and politics, and environmental protection - areas which correspond to respondents' opinions about the most useful areas of NGO work. Interest is the lowest or completely lacking for involvement in NGOs dealing with international relations, religion, business and professional associations, and trade unions - areas that a relatively small number of citizens evaluate as useful areas of NGO work. Regarding motivation for possible participation in the work of an NGO, most Croatian citizens point out values, acquisition of knowledge, and self-improvement.

5. Regarding knowledge about and attitudes towards NGOs as well as involvement in NGO work and willingness to join an NGO, the results are in accordance with theoretical expectations - younger and middle-age persons, men, the highly educated, and those coming from more urbanized areas and enjoying higher economic status stand out. In terms of political orientation and the importance of religion, it is hard to derive a consistent conclusion. Citizens to whom religion is less important or not important and left-leaning citizens are familiar with the term NGO and its meaning in far greater numbers, whereas more positive specific attitudes are more typical of right-leaning citizens. The willingness to join an NGO is somewhat more characteristic of left or right-leaning citizens than of citizens positioning themselves in the political center.